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Portable restrooms supplied to the construction industry are now larger and offer more amenities.

## Construction boom helps portable restroom businesses “clean up”

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Canada's hot construction market is affecting an essential construction industry service — portable restroom operators.

“With construction companies competing for scarce labour, they're treating their people a little nicer,” said Chris Montgomery, Fleet Manager with Room to Go, a portable restroom company located in Millgrove, Ont.

“Construction is asking for more upscale washrooms, cleaner washrooms and more sanitary washrooms.”

While some companies specialize in rental and service, Room to Go manufactures its own units.

“Construction toilets take a lot of abuse, like every piece of construction equipment,” said Montgomery.

“We're building them tougher and more upscale, with porcelain toilets and sinks, electrical heating, hot water and ventilation.”

Portable toilet services aren't having any trouble keeping up with demand, because toilets can be manufactured on short notice.

“Typically, this industry has been trained to respond quickly to demand,” said Steve Washburn, customer service director with portable toilet manufacturer PolyJohn in Whiting, Ind.

“We supply the Canadian market in part through Rama Plastics in Orillia and we can generally get the product out within about a week.”

Washburn notes that there's an increased demand for toilets that can be lifted by crane to the tops of highrise construction projects, or smaller, self-contained units that can be raised on freight elevators.

Most portable restrooms, however, are becoming larger.

"The units we build are roomier," he says. "Some of the workers are big people wearing a lot of gear and hard hats."

Part of the evolution to larger units, however, involves tougher regulations about sanitary facilities for workers.

"The Ontario Ministry of Labour (MOL) says that portable toilets must have a sink with running water, a flush toilet and heat in the winter," said Darryl Hindle, a partner in A-1 Toilet Rentals of Thornbury, Ont.

"That's one of the reasons the units have been getting bigger — to accommodate all of the extra equipment. Most of the old-style units are just too small, especially in the winter, when construction workers are wearing winter clothing."

Improvements have also resulted in increased costs. "I used to buy a basic toilet unit for about \$700," said Hindle.

"When I add a toilet and a sink, it goes up to \$1,300. When I add heat, light and running water to that, it jumps to \$10,000 per unit. Those costs are reflected in rental prices. Contractors who used to rent for \$150 a month are now paying \$400 a month per unit — before servicing."

Hindle said that contractors — not portable restroom operators — are responsible for dealing with MOL inspectors.

"We inform contractors about what the ministry says they're supposed to have, but many of them order a basic model," he said.

"They can't justify the increased costs."

Some contractors are asking for less expensive recirculating flush toilets, which use waste liquid as a flushing medium.

"The units don't require the large water tanks to provide flushing water, so they're less expensive," said Hindle.

"Our argument with the regulations is that you're providing a flush toilet to prevent waste from splashing back —yet sloshing out the toilet with waste satisfies the regulation."

Only two charges involving restrooms have been laid with respect to the Regulations for Construction Projects under the Occupational Health and Safety Act over the past three years.

"I've heard of three or four cases of an unfavourable inspection by the MOL, but only at larger sites like apartment or commercial developments," said Hindle.

"In one of those cases, it was only because the inspector stepped inside to use it."

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